EDITORIAL:
QUR’ĀN, ORIENTALISTS AND WESTERN SCHOLARS

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Ever since I started studying and working on Islam and its texts (i.e. Qur’ān and ḥadīth), I wished I could discover new layers of well-done research by non-Muslim scholars who spent considerable time on Islamic issues (e.g. religious; social; political; cultural) or Middle Eastern studies, but, to be honest, at that time I was not really familiar with their research methodology, authenticity of their claims and even Muslims’ responses to non-Muslims’ claims about Islamic texts. These scholars are well-known as orientalists. The most famous one among them is I. Goldziher (1850-1921), a Hungarian scholar, who devoted most of his time as a pioneer on the issue of Islam and its history. After him, the number of orientalists significantly increased and they focused on different aspects of Islam. In the contemporary era, Muslims and non-Muslims generally focus on the nature of Islam and particularly the Qur’ān. Nonetheless, there are still some types of discussions among some Muslims as well as orientalists who follow a polemical tendency. Occasionally, polemical debates bring about misunderstanding among the public, an aversion to science among scholars, and an aversion to religion among Muslims. For instance, Muzaffar Iqbāl (2009) does not completely accept the efforts of contributors (especially non-Muslim scholars) to the Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān1 (EQ) project under the editorship of Jane Dammen McAuliffe (2003); he suggests that non-Muslim contributors who have written many EQ entries are not really familiar with Islam and its nature. Iqbāl (2009) has even suggested that Muslim contributors and readers of EQ got

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themselves involved in a distorted project. Some assessments of Iqbāl’s claims about the EQ project have been given in Andrew Rippin’s essay “The Reception of Euro-American Scholarship on the Qur’ān and Tafsīr: An Overview”.

However, this type of critical discussions about orientalists’ scientific efforts and the reaction of Muslims to them or vice versa must move warily and only concentrate on methodology and literature of a work rather than judge an author’s personality.

On the other hand, there are several Western scholars’ positive statements (whether reliable or non-reliable) about different aspects of the Qur’ān, such that some Muslim scholars referred to these statements in their works. On this subject, some works have not been written precisely but some of them are written accurately as explained in reviews of Wagner’s lengthy work on the Qur’ān: “For non-Muslim, English-speaking readers of the Qur’ān who become overwhelmed and perplexed, Wagner . . . comes to the rescue. . . . This is a well-researched, thoughtful, and fair-minded treatment... highly recommended for academic collections and general public library readership”. Moreover, some researchers like  המוذن Andreas Tzortzis who has converted to Islam collected the statements of Western thinkers including Arthur J. Arberry (1964), Edward Montet.


4 Those part of essays or notes in which the citations and references are not recognized as accredited and certain resources (I, myself, experienced it before).


7 “Briefly, the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendor of the original.” Arthur J. Arberry. The Koran Interpreted (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1964.

(1929) and R. Bosworth Smith\textsuperscript{9} and so forth, to express the linguistic excellence of the Qur’ān\textsuperscript{10}.

The importance of the issue of Western scholars’ statements concerning the Qur’ān is same as the Orientalists viewpoints on the Qur’ān. Because Westerners’ statements are quickly shared among the group of people\textsuperscript{11}, they are able to present various images from the Western scholars and their attitude in the Muslims World.

Here, two significant questions came to my mind: (a) what is the main intention of some of Western scholars who have talked pleasantly about the Qur’ān?; (b) Why are some Muslim scholars going to convey and distribute the kind messages of Western scholars about the Qur’ān to Muslims and non-Muslims? The proposed questions by Andrew Rippin, on my last contact with him, are worthy of note: why is an appeal made to such people to validate Islam? What does that tell us about those making the claim?

Therefore, \textit{al-Bayān} as an academic peer-reviewed journal is going to publish scholarly works\textsuperscript{12} (critical and descriptive) in domain of (a) ‘Orientalism and the Qur’ān’, methodology and literature of Orientalists’ works, (b) the Muslims’ approach to the Western scholars’ statements about the Qur’ān, in its next issues.

It would also be impressive if scholars share their knowledge with us and prepare some detailed essays similar to those which

\textsuperscript{9} The Qur’ān is: “…A miracle of purity of style, of wisdom and of truth. It is the one miracle claimed by Muhammad, his standing miracle, and a miracle indeed it is. Reginald Bosworth Smith, \textit{Muḥammad and Muḥammadanism} (Lahore: Sind Sagar Academy,) 1876.

\textsuperscript{10} Ḥāmzah Andreas Tzortzis, \textit{an Introduction the Literary and Linguistic Excellence of the Qur’ān} (Islam and Muslim in the West), n.d. See also: http://www.islam21c.com/artman/132230_an_introduction_to_the_literary_and_linguistic_excellence_of_the_quran.pdf


\textsuperscript{12} Preferably English Articles
have been published in journal of Qur’ānic Studies (Edinburgh University Press) vol.14, No.1 (April 2012)\textsuperscript{13}.

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\textsuperscript{13} http://www.euppublishing.com/journal/jqs

\textsuperscript{14} Core values of the University of Malaya are available at: http://um.edu.my/mainpage.php?module=Maklumat&kategori=51&id=195&papar=1